PEPIN

A TALE OF TWELFTH NIGHT

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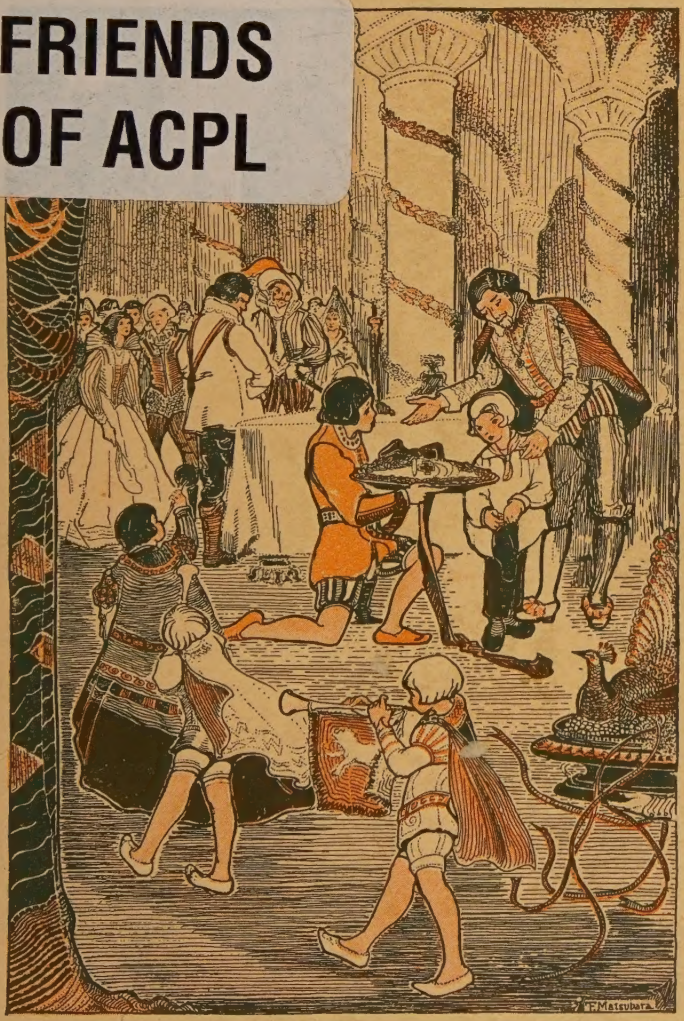

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53 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass.

"GRANDSIRE," HE ASKED, "WHY DO THE WOLVES HOWL SO LONG TO-NIGHT?" (*See Page 32*)

PEPIN:
A Tale of Twelfth Night

BY

EVALEEN STEIN

Author of "When Fairies Were Friendly," "The Christmas Porringer," "Gabriel and the Hour Book," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
T. MATSUBARA

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BOSTON PUBLISHERS

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Made in U. S. A.

First Impression, October, 1924
Second Impression, December, 1925
Third Impression, December, 1937

PRINTED BY THE COLONIAL PRESS INC.
CLINTON, MASS., U.S.A.

To My Friend

MADAME PAULINE MARIOTTE DAVIES

WHOSE VERSION OF AN OLD LEGEND OF HER
OWN FAIR FRANCE I HAVE WOVEN INTO
THE FOLLOWING LITTLE TALE

U. S. 858305

CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter I	1
Chapter II	31
Chapter III	52
Chapter IV	84
Chapter V	111
Chapter VI	140
Chapter VII	170

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

"'GRANDSIRE,' HE ASKED, 'WHY DO THE WOLVES HOWL SO LONG TONIGHT?'" (*see page* 32) . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"THE LITTLE ONES WILL WATCH THE HIGH-ROADS" 11

"HE RAISED HIS HAND AND POINTED TOWARD THE CASTLE TOWERS" 61

"HE WAS VERY HUNGRY" 99

"'TRY THY LUCK WITH THE BEAN'" . . . 149

"HE FELL ON HIS KNEES BEFORE THE CHRIST-CHILD" 167

Pepin: A Tale of Twelfth Night

I

Lo, 'tis now the twelfth day since the Christmas bells did peal forth their joy in the blessed Christ-child's birth, and with this night ends the holy season which we keep to do him honor; therefore on the morrow must we cast in the fire our boughs of mistletoe and our holly garlands, lest, as wise folk declare, the elves and hob-goblins might do us mischief. And ever at this time does there come

to my mind a strange story, which I will tell thee, my child, if thou wilt harken; for the tale has to do with the Babe who lay in the manger and with this day whereon the Three Wise Kings of long ago did kneel before him offering him their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Surely thou knowest how they came seeking him from their far-away kingdoms, Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, in their splendid purple mantles and crowns of gold, riding on camels all shining with scarlet trappings and tinkling with little silver bells, whilst overhead shone and sparkled the wondrous Star that led them to Bethlehem. Now, when thou hast heard

the story I shall tell thee, if thou dost wonder how certain parts of it came to pass, I can say only that I myself know not; I do but repeat the strange happenings which the folk of France declare took place in the olden days; though, in truth, the beginning of the tale is homely and simple enough, as thus:

Long and long ago, in the old province of Bourbonnaise, in the heart of France, there stood a great forest. Not far from one edge of this a rude wooden fence enclosed a bit of ground which surrounded the hut of a poor vine-dresser. Small and brown and weather-beaten it

was, and its roof, thatched with straw, was heaped with snow; for the wintry day that was breaking was, even as is this day, the twelfth after Christmas. Still were starry flakes falling, drifting over the dark green boughs of the tall pines and hemlocks and hanging the bare branches of beech and chestnut trees with feathery garlands of white. Now and then did the wind, sweeping fitfully through the forest, send the smoke which curled from the clay chimney of the hut whirling about it in a blue cloud; and as one of these chilly gusts shook and rattled the door, suddenly it opened and there came out a little lad. A coarse

smock of homespun he wore, and on his head was a knitted cap with a pointed top and swinging tassel. In one hand he carried a wisp of hay and in the other three small cakes of oaten meal sprinkled with a bit of barley sugar.

Eagerly the lad looked around, and then, passing through the gate of the little door-yard, hastened toward the sheet of drifted white which covered the highroad not far distant, his wooden shoes stuffed with straw making deep prints in the untrodden snow through which he went. When he reached the road, wistfully did he gaze up and down to where it wound away in the distance; but no marks

could he see to tell of the passing of either man or beast.

For a few moments thus did he stand there, panting a little from his walk through the heavy snow and still watching the road. Then, by and by, he pricked up his ears to the sound of a silvery tinkling.

As nearer and nearer it drew, "Oh," he said to himself, his face brightening whilst the eager look deepened in his eyes, "it may be 'tis the camel-bells of the Kings." And he tried to hurry in the direction of the sound.

But his face fell when he passed a curve of the road and there was naught save the heavy two-wheeled

cart of Peasant Coquillard; the big, shaggy horse, pulling it, at every step set ringing the little bell on top of the broad wooden collar which he wore.

Then did two quick tears of disappointment spring to the lad's eyes, but he brushed them away as, "Ho, Peasant Coquillard," he did call, "hast thou seen aught of the Three Wise Kings?"

"Well, well, son," answered the peasant with a kindly smile, "thou art up early." Then shaking his head sagely, "The Three Wise Kings?" he repeated. "Nay, Pepin, not on this road have I seen them; but two miles back, where it forks

to go to Angers, sure was I that I did catch a glimpse of them."

"Didst thou?" asked Pepin quickly, his eagerness returning. "Were they all together, Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazzar? And did they wear golden crowns and furred mantles, and were they of a truth riding on camels with little silver bells on their bridles? And, oh, Peasant Coquillard," the boy added, his voice shrill with excitement, "tell me, what manner of strange beast might be a camel?"

"Not so fast with thy questions, my child," replied Peasant Coquillard, rubbing his eyes a bit uncertainly. "Thou knowest these two

hours has the snow been whirling down, so none can tell beyond a doubt the yea or nay of what he sees. But something there was, I saw, shining down the road to Angers, and it might have been their gold crowns —— and I did hear a tinkling of bells, I dare say quite like camels wear, though to be sure never have I looked upon those strange beasts, seeing that I have never journeyed to the far countries the Wise Kings rule. 'Tis a pity, Pepin, thou couldst not have chosen the Angers road. But run home now, son, and mayhap next year thy luck will mend."

Why was Pepin watching for the

Three Kings, dost thou ask, my child? Harken, and I will tell thee. It was when the dear Christ-child was twelve days old that the wonderful Star of the East did at last stand still over the stable of Bethlehem, and the royal riders found the Babe whom they had sought so far. Therefore in many parts of the world, and especially in the French land, is holiday made in memory of them, and 'tis called Twelfth Day, or the Feast of the Kings. And the French folk tell their children that early in the morning of that day again do the Kings ride on earth, even as they did when the Christ-child lay in the manger of Bethle-

THE LITTLE ONES WILL WATCH THE HIGHROADS

hem, and that if the little ones will watch the highroads it might be they will see them. That is why on Twelfth Day they hurry forth to look for the strange riders; and always do they fill their hands with the best of their Christmas goodies, which they keep to offer to the Kings, and with wisps of hay to feed the camels. For in the kindness of their hearts the little ones feel sure that all, both Kings and beasts, must be weary and hungry because of their long journeying from those far-away kingdoms whence they come. But the trouble is, none can tell of a truth which road the riders will take, so never are the children

quite certain which one to follow.

Thus, on that Twelfth Day morning long ago, Pepin, though from what Peasant Coquillard had said he knew he had made a mistake, yet could he not help hoping that mayhap the Wise Kings might change their minds and after all come riding along the highroad where he stood. So, still gazing wistfully around, he waited a little longer.

Two miles away, in the wintry distance, was the old city of Angers, and in the sharp frosty air Pepin fancied he could hear the cathedral bells chiming for the holiday mass. But then, so intently was he harkening for the camels of the Kings

that his ears seemed filled with the sound of bells; though, indeed, really might he have heard them ringing in the village of Bourbon, hidden beyond a far curve of the road and nestling, with its narrow, crooked streets and little houses with peaked roofs of thatch, close beneath the crag whereon towered the strong castle of the lord of the land, Duke Loys, or, as more often was he called by his vassals, "Loys the Good."

That was because he did rule them kindly and tried to better the lot of the poor peasants who tilled his fields and tended his flocks, and dressed the vines which in their season covered the hills with purple

grapes. In those days the life of such humble folk of France was hard enough at best; for hundreds of years had their families ploughed and sown and reaped for the nobles who lived in the castles and possessed the land. In return for their toil the peasants received an humble home for themselves and in time of war, which was often, their lord was obliged to protect them with his soldiers. But if the lord they served chose to be harsh or cruel, nowhere had they to turn for help; they were not allowed to seek a home elsewhere, and, in truth, no more dreamed they of such a thing than of uprooting the trees in the great

forests and planting them in the lands of another master. So were they used to bearing their lot with patience, whether it were good or ill, and often indeed it was ill enough. But with the peasant folk of Loys the Good it was not so; the well-beloved Duke pitied their toil and hardships, and, as I have told thee, kindly and justly did he govern them; and the great door of his castle was ever open to the poor and needy as to those of high estate.

And now did Pepin gaze up at those tall castle towers and turrets all capped with gleaming snow; he wondered if perchance the Three Kings had ridden thither and might

even then be warming themselves at the great fire of logs which he knew would be blazing on the castle hearth. Then did he remember that since the wheat harvest had Duke Loys been away. Though Pepin knew not wherefore he had gone, 'twas to the city of Paris wherein stood the royal palace and whither Loys and other of the great nobles had been summoned because of the grievous illness of the French King. No one knew when he would return, and the little lad sighed, for he felt sure that, as the good Duke was not in his castle to welcome them, the Wise Kings must have fared on elsewhere.

Then, as thinking of the blazing logs in the castle fire-place reminded him that he himself was shivering with the cold, reluctantly did he thrust the oaten cakes in the pocket of his smock, and, pushing the wisp of hay along with the straw in his wooden shoes, he turned around and made his way as fast as he could through the drifting snow back to the hut by the forest.

When he opened the door, an old man was sitting by the fire mending a pruning hook. "Old Yann, the vinedresser," was he called by the peasant folk, and grandsire he was to the young lad.

Hearing the boy enter, he looked

up from the pruning hook which lay on his knees. "Well, child," he said, "didst thou see the Three Kings this time?"

"Nay, Grandsire," answered Pepin, coming near the hearth and warming his hands. "Peasant Coquillard did say they passed down the road to Angers, and sure I was I heard the bells of the cathedral ringing for them there. Oh, I wish 'twas that way I had gone. But thou knowest, Grandsire, last year they rode beyond Bourbon and I missed them because I went toward Angers." And again did the tears of disappointment spring to Pepin's eyes.

"There, there, little one, never

thou mind," said old Yann, pausing from his work to lift off the lad's cap and stroke his dark hair right tenderly. For Pepin's father had been dead since the boy's babyhood and his mother for a twelvemonth, so none was there left to care for him save only the patient grandsire. A peasant he was, belonging to the lands of Duke Loys; and though the hut wherein he and Pepin lived was humble enough, yet had it a whole thatch over head and always was there a fire on the hearth and a pot of soup hanging over it. Sadly indeed did they miss the mother's care; nevertheless, old Yann and the lad were both industrious, and betwixt

them right well did they manage to keep the hut tidy. Besides, Yann was no ordinary peasant; in his youth for three years had he served in the castle under Duke François, the father of Loys. And though, to be sure, most of that time was Yann only a boy of all work, yet was he quick of wit and understanding and therefore had his life in the castle taught him many things. Moreover, one of the pages to the Duke had befriended him and shown him much kindness, and in this way also had he learned as a lad a gentler manner and speech than did most peasant folk. As he grew older, because of his liking for all growing things, and

because whatsoever he planted in the castle garden flourished as if by magic, he had been appointed vine-dresser by the Duke; for to this day is Bourbonnaise famous for its rich vintage of grapes.

Thus had Yann passed his life, and as now he sat on the bench mending his pruning hook, he made a place beside him; and drawing Pepin down, "Come," he said, "sit by Grandsire and do thou help to mend these tools. Do not grieve because thou didst not choose the King's road; always canst thou try thy luck another year;" and again did he pause to pat the lad's hair. For in their lonely life the old man

strove as best he could to make up to the orphaned boy the tenderness he needs must miss from father and mother.

Quietly did they work together for a little while, and then Yann, laying down his tools, rose from the bench. "Well, Pepin," he said, "though the Kings did pass another way, nor could we go to the merry-making in the village, yet must we not forget our Twelfth-loaf for this night." So, taking a sack of coarse, dark meal from a shelf over a deal table and bidding Pepin fetch some other needful things, then did he begin mixing them in an earthen bowl. Presently, patting out a round, flat loaf of

dough and taking a knife, he did prick a cross on one part of it. Then placing it in an iron pot, he brought it to the hearth to rise.

Pepin had been watching him, and as he looked at the loaf, he pointed to the part whereon was pricked the cross, and "Grandsire," he asked, "dost thou think a beggar will come for this to-night?"

"Nay," replied Yann, "I doubt if so. Yet will we keep the portion, and if any poor wayfarer asks, right welcome will he be to it. Many a beggar will be treading the roads this night, and 'tis rough weather for the homeless," added Yann, with a sigh, "but rather will they be flocking to

the castles to receive their share of the fine Twelfth-loafs of the noble folks." And again did old Yann sigh as he looked at the humble loaf of coarse meal beginning to rise on the hearth.

Dost thou ask, thou who hearest this tale, what manner of dainty were the Twelfth-loafs whereof Yann spoke? Harken, as I tell thee. Always for the feast of the nobles, which on this night was the merriest of all the year, was provided a wonderful sweet loaf; especially made, it was, for this Feast of the Kings, and still to this day do the people of France so fashion it. Fine white flour, almonds and

honey and spices, all these go into its making; and in the olden days always in one portion of it was there baked a bean, and this it was which made the feast so merry. For whosoever of the noble guests received the bean in his share, him did the rest hail as "King of the Bean," and he it was who ruled the revel until midnight. All the others were obliged to obey his every command laid upon them, even as though this mimic king were indeed their own true sovereign crowned and throned in the ancient city of Paris. And because of this obedience which all must show to him, 'twas the duty of the King of the Bean to provide

tasks which would provoke laughter; and many and merry were the madcap pranks that ever followed his crowning.

But another thing there was which thou must know concerning the Twelfth-loaf; always was a goodly portion of it marked with a cross and set apart as the right of the first beggar who should knock at the castle door. And true it was, as old Yann had declared, that in those days poor folk aplenty were wandering on the highroads. This portion marked with the cross was called "God's Share," because we are taught that to give to the poor is the same as giving to our Lord;

and no one dreamed of dividing the Twelfth-loaf without leaving this share, for not to do so would have been thought both wicked and unlucky. And because of this custom of the noble folk, many of the peasants also did mark with a cross the loaves of black bread they baked on this day, even as did old Yann; for though in their huts there was no King of the Bean, neither merriment nor feasting, nevertheless did their hearts pity those poorer than themselves; and they thought perhaps that some weary wayfarer, too feeble to climb to castle heights, might knock at their own doors to ask their bounty. In truth, it is the

humble folk, used to toil and hardship, who ofttimes can feel more compassion for the beggar's lot than do those bred up within noble halls.

Now, my child, since I have told thee of the Twelfth-loaf of the olden days, do thou remember well these two things whereof I have spoken: the *King of the Bean*, and the beggar's portion which was called *God's Share*, for much have they to do with this tale.

II

And now will we go back to the hut wherein did old Yann and Pepin busy themselves through the short wintry day. At evenfall, having finished their supper and set the beggar's portion of their dark loaf upon a pewter plate to await any chance wayfarer, then did they pull their bench near to the hearth, and side by side for awhile they watched in silence the flames as they leaped and flickered around the oaken log which Yann laid upon the fire.

Without, the wind rose sharply, driving the whirling snowflakes be-

fore it and drifting them over the hut and through the great, bleak forest.

As these wintry blasts sighed and moaned, or swept by with a shrill wailing, presently did there come from the heart of the forest a sound as of deep baying. Again and yet again echoed the long-drawn dismal cries, and Pepin and old Yann shivered as they harkened. Then did the young lad creep closer to his grandsire; and as once more the snarling sound rang out mingling with the wind, "Grandsire," he asked, "why do the wolves howl so long to-night?"

"Nay, child," answered Yann,

"that I cannot tell. Unless," he said, pausing awhile, "it may be they do call for their comrade, Gundebold the Wolf. Thou knowest 'tis Twelfth Night when he follows with the pack."

"Gundebold the Wolf?" repeated Pepin, with a question in his voice. "Who was he? I know naught about him."

"What sayest thou?" said Yann, as he turned slowly and looked down at the lad. "Didst thy father never tell thee of Gundebold?" Then did he add, sighing a bit, for old people do sigh often in thinking of the past, "Ah, well, I had forgotten, child, too young thou wast

whilst thy father lived, seeing thou wast but a babe. Yet as none there be in Bourbonnaise but must some time hear the tale, I will tell it to thee, even as I had it from my father, and he from his grandsire; for in such manner, I know not from how far back, has the story been handed down."

Eagerly did Pepin wait, as the old man, softly stroking the lad's hair, paused again and sat gazing at the red coals upon the hearth.

Then passing his hand across his eyes, at last he began; telling the tale to the young lad even as I repeat his words to thee, my child. Thus spoke old Yann. "Long,

long, long ago, more than thrice a hundred years, in the days when the good King Louis surnamed 'The Saint,' ruled our realm of France, there lived a baron of Burgundy whose name was Gundebold."

"Where is Burgundy, Grandsire?" asked Pepin.

U. S. 858305

"As to that," replied Yann, a bit uncertainly, "I cannot tell thee more than this; 'tis just beyond our own province of Bourbonnaise. A fair country 'tis said to be to-day, full of vineyards and with rich pastures of sweet grass for flocks and herds. But in the days of the Baron Gundebold, rough and lonely it was, and many and wild were the great

forests wherein did range boars and wolves and all manner of fierce untamed creatures of the woods.

"Over one of the wildest of these woodlands, a dark reach of pines and hemlocks called the Forest of Ott, rose a rocky height; and on this stood the strong castle of the baron, with its high towers and walls of stone thicker than a man is tall."

"Was it larger than the castle of our Duke Loys?" again did Pepin ask.

"Yes," answered Yann, "'twas larger and stronger even than his, and deep and wide was the moat round about it. But though Baron Gundebold's castle was filled to

overflowing with splendid furnishings, for great riches were his, yet did the great, gray towers rise grim and forbidding, and the place was shunned by all save the evil companions of the baron. For Gundebold himself was hard-hearted and selfish, and wild and roistering was the life he led, caring for naught so much as the hunt. He would leap on his horse and, seizing his bow and boar-spear, so furiously would he gallop off chasing the beasts through the forest that often was he called the 'Wild Huntsman.' Thou knowest, Pepin, I have told thee of the wicked hunter who rides on the storm-wind over the tops of the

tallest trees of the forest, his fierce pack of hounds snarling and baying about him and the Evil One close on his heels?"

"Yes, Grandsire," answered Pepin, giving another little shiver as he crept closer.

"Well," continued Yann, "the Baron Gundebold was indeed a wild rider, and so fierce and merciless did he become in his chase of the forest beasts, and so cruel and heartless to the peasant folk around him, that soon people began to add to his name 'The Wolf.'

"As thou canst guess, child, he was not loved by his vassals as is our Duke Loys the Good. But

though well he knew he was both feared and hated, little cared Gundebold. So that his own table was spread with the richest fare and his cloak and doublet were of the finest fur and velvet, it mattered not to him if the poor peasants who tilled his fields and dressed his vines had naught but rags to wear and crusts for food."

Here did old Yann pause for a moment, thinking of the castle life he had seen in his youth. Then did he go on thus: "Thou dost not dream, Pepin, what wonderful things the noble folk do eat and drink! Thou knowest when I was a lad I did serve in the castle in the time

of the father of our Duke Loys, and never will I forget the silver platters and flagons, and the gold and jewelled cups that were sent in for his table, and the fine white loaves, and the spits full of pheasants and hares and boar's flesh and venison roasting in the great kitchen, and the baskets of strange fruits from far countries, and the sweetmeats which the castle cooks did fashion in the oddest shapes! 'Tis almost past believing!"

As the old man sat living over the past, "Do noble folk always eat white bread; and all those other wonderful things?" added the lad vaguely. For never had he been in

a castle kitchen, and naught did he guess of what went on therein.

"Always," replied old Yann, nodding his head wisely. "And we peasant folk must be content with our coarse black loaves; that is the way of the world," and again did he nod. "But never does Duke Loys let us go without bread, and always does he see to it that we have a sound thatch over our heads and a whole smock to our backs; which is more than did Gundebold.

"Withal so haughty and selfish and wild he was, that the hearts of all his vassals melted with pity when they saw the young bride he one day brought home to his castle.

Fair and sweet she was, as beautiful as the white lilies that grow in the garden of Duke Loys. And so kind and gentle she was to everyone, that soon was she christened by all as 'The Dove'; and thus always did they speak of her."

"Was the Baron Gundebold cruel to *her?*" said the lad, wondering if even The Wolf could be unkind to so sweet a bride.

For answer old Yann did but nod his head sadly as he went on with the tale. "'Twas an ill mating, The Wolf and The Dove, and wretched and sorrowful enough must have been the lot of the wife of Gundebold. By and by, when a son

was born to them, fair and gentle he was, like to his mother; and this angered The Wolf. Gundebold loved the child, in a fierce, masterful way, more than his hard heart had ever loved anything, but he wished him to be bold and reckless like himself; and to make him so, just as soon as little Gaspard, for thus did they call him, could sit in front of him on his saddle-bow, then did The Wolf begin to take him for companion on his wild hunts."

"I should think The Dove must have been ill pleased with that, and so must Gaspard also," said Pepin, who himself was a gentle lad and so did shrink from the thought of chas-

ing to the death the creatures of the forest.

"Yes," answered Yann, "little Gaspard did indeed hate and dread those fierce rides even as wouldst thou, Pepin. And as for The Dove, many and bitter were the tears she shed to be thus forced to see the child so early trained in those rough and dangerous ways. But," here did old Yann shrug his shoulders as he went on, "who could withstand the will of The Wolf? And so, day after day, in vain did The Dove wring her white hands as she besought him to leave the boy with her; for Gundebold paid no heed.

"But at last, when Gaspard was

about thine age, Pepin, there came a day when The Wolf, snatching him from his play, swung him to the saddle of his great black horse and galloped off to chase the wild boars through the Forest of Ott.

"Pale and trembling, the lad clung to his father when they set out; and paler still, but trembling no longer, did he come home. For it was his lifeless body that lay across the saddle-bow. Gundebold, in seeking to hurl his heavy boar-spear, had unwittingly struck and slain Gaspard. And well-nigh crazed with grief was the unhappy father as he bore him back to the castle."

As old Yann paused in his telling,

Pepin was silent, save for a low, long-drawn sigh of pity.

Presently, again did Yann take up the tale. "Before long The Dove faded away and died of her sorrow. And Gundebold, if he had been wild and reckless before, now was he a hundredfold more so. He passed his time chasing the boars and wolves by day, and by night feasting and drinking red wine with the companions he would gather in his castle; all of them only a little less wild and wicked than himself.

"And so it went on till Twelfth Day came, and in the castles round about him they kept the Feast of the Kings. But Gundebold, though he

held a feast that night, had no mind to honor the Wise Kings. Little enough did he care for them, or the blessed Christ-child either; no Christmas had he kept, nor did any green garlands deck his walls as in the castles of the other noble folk who had remembered the Christ-child's birthday. Nay, Gundebold's feast did but chance to fall on Twelfth Night, and 'twas but one of his many wild revels where they did eat and drink enough for thrice their number and amused themselves shouting out rude jests and loudly singing their wicked, heathenish songs. And never one of them gave a thought to the little Lord Jesus in the manger of

Bethlehem, nor to the Three Kings who came seeking Him on this day."

Again did old Yann sit lost in thought for a few moments; then did he go on. "As I have told thee, great riches had the Baron Gundebold, and these did he delight to show. Therefore, very splendid was his table as it stood in the midst of the castle hall, spread for that Twelfth Night feast. Gold and silver cups and flagons and platters glittered in the torchlight as the company took their places. At the head of the table sat The Wolf; he was dressed in the finest of velvet and over his furred mantle and wide

collar of lace hung golden chains set thick with jewels. When all were ready, at a signal from the baron there came into the hall a long procession of serving men bearing the most costly food."

"Was there a Twelfth-loaf with a bean in it?" asked Pepin.

"'Tis to that part of the story I am coming," replied Yann. "Naught cared The Wolf for aught to remind him of the day; but those there were who served him in the castle kitchen who were more careful to keep the Feast of the Kings. So a Twelfth-loaf had they made, and though in it they had placed a bean, thinking thus to please their master with

some fresh excuse for folly, not less had they taken pains to mark with a cross another goodly part of it for God's Share.

"At the beginning of the feast was the great loaf borne in so that some one of the noisy company might be proclaimed King of the Bean and so rule the revel. When each guest had taken his portion, then was the platter which held it set before Gundebold; and dark was his frown when he saw God's Share still left upon it. For he had no pity for the poor and did scorn the kindly old custom of giving them part of the Twelfth-loaf. Frowning again, then did he take from the

platter the beggar's share, and slowly crumbled it on the floor so that the hound at his feet might lick it up.

III

"SCARCELY had the hound at Duke Gundebold's feet finished the last morsel of the Twelfth-loaf," went on Grandfather, "when, *Tap*, *tap*, *tap*, there came a knocking at the great oaken door of the castle. *Tap*, *tap*, *tap*, again they heard it, and a hush fell on that noisy company, and they stared at each other wonderingly. For there was something strange about the knocking. It seemed very soft and gentle, and yet, though the door was three fingers thick, so clearly came the tapping that the Wolf himself and

all his roistering comrades started, for the sound seemed to be at the very elbow of each as they sat at the long table in the midst of the great hall.

"As they listened, the castle seneschal unbarred the door and spoke to someone who stood without. And then he came to Gundebold, and kneeling before him, 'My lord,' he said, 'yonder stands a beggar, bent and weary-looking and wrapped in a ragged cloak. He is shivering with the cold and asks thy pity and that he may warm himself at the castle fire and eat of God's Share of thy feast.'"

"What did the Baron Gundebold

answer?" asked Pepin, who was listening intently.

"Ah, little one," said Grandfather, "the Wolf made answer so cruel and wicked, thou with thy tender heart couldst scarce believe it, and even his wild companions shrank with fear as they heard it. He lifted up his gold and jeweled cup and, swallowing the red wine, dashed the empty cup to the stone floor; he cried out harshly, 'Bid yonder tattered beggar begone from out my gates, else I loose my hounds upon him, and tell him in this, my feast, God has not a share!'"

Again Grandfather paused for a moment and stared into the fire,

shivering a little, though the log on the hearth was burning brightly, and then he went on. "The seneschal, who had a kind heart, was terrified at the thought of bearing so cruel a message to the poor beggar; and still he knelt at the feet of Duke Gundebold vainly hoping he might take back his evil words. But the Wolf, with a scornful laugh, pushed him from him with his foot, commanding him to do his bidding; and the poor man durst not disobey.

"Slowly he rose to his feet and passed to the great door. And the rest of the tale has been handed down from the lips of the sen-

eschal, for no other saw the beggar who waited without. His head was bowed and his hands crossed meekly on his breast. The hood of his ragged cloak cast a shadow over his face so the seneschal could not well see it as he slowly repeated the message of the Wolf, for scarcely could he bring himself to say the wicked words. When he had finished, the beggar raised his head, and never, the seneschal said, had he seen so sorrowful a look nor such wondrous eyes; they were like two stars from the sky only that their brightness seemed dimmed by tears. Then the ragged cloak slipped from his shoulders and a sudden white glow, like

moonlight, seemed to wrap him instead."

"What was it?" asked Pepin, breathlessly.

"Listen, child," said Grandfather, "and thou wilt learn: When the seneschal saw the strange light, he fell on his knees before the beggar and hid his face. When again he ventured to look, the beggar was no longer there; but where he had stood was a child more lovely than he had ever dreamed could be. He wore a little seamless robe of white, and as the seneschal stared, such a white and golden light streamed from it and from his hair that after that first glimpse of the child's face, he saw it

no more; only his little figure standing in the brightness that played around him."

"Was it the Christ-child?" whispered Pepin, with awe and wonder in his voice.

"Thou hast guessed rightly," replied Grandfather. "Thou knowest the little Lord Jesus visits the earth again at the blessed Christmas season, and no doubt He came disguised as a beggar to see if indeed the heart of the Wolf was so pitiless as it seemed when he cast God's Share to the hound. As for the seneschal, after that one glimpse of His shining face, 'It is the blessed Christ-child!' he gasped, and again he hid his own

face in terror and began to pray for mercy because of the wicked message he had brought from Duke Gundebold.

"At this the Child, though never a word He spoke, as if He knew the poor man was not to blame, signed for him to rise and follow Him, and turned from the castle door and started across the courtyard. There was a light fall of snow covering the flagstones, and the seneschal said as the Child's little feet, which were bare, twinkled over it, they glistened like the snowflakes and seemed to fall as softly; they scarcely printed the white path, and though the seneschal shivered in the cold, the little

barefooted Child in his shining robe seemed not to feel it. On they went till they came to the great gateway of the castle. The gate-keeper was half asleep, and did not notice them as they passed out and crossed the drawbridge spanning the moat, the trembling seneschal all the while following the shining figure ahead.

"When they reached the farther side of the moat, again the seneschal fell on his knees as the Child stopped and, standing quite still, turned toward the castle at which He seemed to gaze long and sorrowfully. Though, as I have told you, His face was hidden by the brightness that shone around it, yet could

HE RAISED HIS HAND AND POINTED TOWARD THE CASTLE TOWERS

the seneschal see the sad drooping of His shoulders and of His body, as though from something He must do but which His gentle heart shrank from doing.

"Then slowly, very slowly, He raised His hand and pointed toward the castle towers which rose gray and high, showing faintly in the starlight. For it was a clear moonless night. And then a strange thing happened."

Pepin, who had been listening very breathlessly, here sat up very straight; and he could hardly wait as again Grandfather paused a little while before going on. But at last he spoke.

"Though, as I said, the night had been clear and the stars shining brightly, the moment that baby finger pointed toward the castle, up from each of the four corners of the sky rolled a heavy black cloud, quickly spreading over and blotting out the stars; and from the midst of it came a flash of lightning, red as blood, and a peal of thunder that shook the earth. And then a furious wind arose and blew as if it would sweep away the world. And one by one the great thick walls and strong towers of Duke Gundebold's castle crumpled up and toppled to the ground, falling like withered leaves in the autumn."

"Oh, Grandfather!" gasped Pepin; and then after a moment's silence, he asked in an awed voice, "What did the seneschal do?"

"Little one," replied Grandfather, "I think the poor man scarce knew himself, for he was half dead with fear. He said afterwards that never had he seen anything so terrifying as that tiny hand of the Child with its baby finger pointing accusingly at the great towers and they toppling to ruin before it. After the first red flash of lightning which well-nigh blinded him, he did not dare to look again but hid his face as before. After a while, when once more he ventured to raise his

eyes, the Child had vanished, though still the tempest raged over the castle. And the strange part was that, while his ears were deafened by the roaring of the wind and the crashing of the thunder and the lightning lit it all with its fierce red fire, at the end of the drawbridge where the seneschal knelt not a breath of air was stirring; all was still as in a night of summer."

"Did the whole castle fall down?" asked Pepin. "And the people in it, what became of them?"

"Not one stone was left upon another," replied Grandfather. "And to this day, it is said, travelers may

still see the blackened ruins of the one proud castle of Gundebold the Wolf. On the gray crag overlooking the Forest of Ott the broken stones still lie just as they fell when the great towers crashed down that Twelfth Night so long ago. I once saw a traveler who had come from Burgundy and he said those stones have been covered with moss and grasses this many a year, and that few persons ever visit the place, for since the days of the Wolf it has borne an evil name."

"But the people who were there that night?" reminded Pepin. "Thou hast told naught of them."

"The people?" absently repeated

Grandfather, who had again begun to gaze into the coals on the hearth. "Oh, yes, they escaped. Though many of his comrades were almost as wicked as the Wolf himself, it was he who had cast God's Share to his dog and so he it was who must receive the punishment. All the rest at the first pealing of the thunder and roaring of the wind had fled away in fright. The seneschal said, as he knelt there beyond the moat, though his face was hidden when the tempest began, yet could he hear them as, pushing, screaming, crowding together, they ran toward the drawbridge, and pouring across it they streamed down the rocky hill-

side, scattering in every direction, anywhere to get as far away as they could from the doomed castle."

"And Duke Gundebold," added Pepin, "was he with them?"

"Nay, child," answered Grandfather, "he was not with them, though the seneschal thought he had passed with the hurrying throng as he himself knelt by the moat-side while the winds and lightning raged. But it was not for long that the tempest lasted; for the moment the last tower and wall of the castle had fallen to the ground, the wild storm passed as suddenly as it had begun, and again the stars shone out through the quiet sky. The senes-

chal did not stir from his place till daybreak. Indeed, I dare say he knew not whither to go; moreover, the strange and fearful happening of the night must have sorely shaken him. But at the first streak of dawn, slowly he rose up and stared across the moat; for he could hardly believe that all had in very truth come to pass and that it was not some terrible dream. Yet there under the bright sunlight lay the blackened ruins; as I have told you, not one tower or wall was left standing. All was still as death, and, beside himself, there was no living creature in sight save one man who stood leaning on a staff where

once had risen the great banquet hall. He was gazing slowly about him, now and then passing his trembling hand across his eyes as one dazed. After awhile he turned and walked feebly toward the drawbridge, which still spanned the moat though all else was destroyed; and as he came nearer the seneschal stared in amazement, for though the man was bent as if with great age and his hair was white as snow, though he was wrapped in a ragged cloak such as beggars wear, nevertheless the seneschal knew him for Duke Gundebold, and drew back, unable to utter a word, as he passed by."

"Did Duke Gundebold see the seneschal?" asked Pepin.

"I do not think he saw anything around him," answered Grandfather. "Perhaps he was looking into his own heart and finding nothing there to comfort him. But whatever may have been his thoughts, slowly and with eyes staring straight ahead of him, yet seeming to see nothing, he tottered down the steep stony road leading from the castle crag, and disappeared into the Forest of Ott; and never again was he seen by the seneschal nor by any of the wild companions with whom he had spent his days and nights hunting and feasting."

"Did *no* one ever see him again?" inquired Pepin. "And what did you mean, Grandfather, when you said that on Twelfth Night Duke Gundebold follows with the wolves?"

Here Grandfather laid a handful of fresh faggots on the fire, and as the flames curled about them, again he stroked Pepin's hair very softly, and then "Ah, lad," he replied, "truly 'tis a strange story, and strangest of all is its ending. But nay," he added thoughtfully, "'tis not yet ended and none may say how or when it will be. Listen, Pepin. It is said that from the day he passed into the Forest of Ott no

living creature has seen Duke Gundebold save only on one night in the year, Twelfth Night. This is his punishment, for every Twelfth Night, wrapped in a ragged cloak, shivering with cold, and weary and footsore and hungry, even as the poorest beggar he must wander from door to door asking for God's Share yet never receiving it. For though it was hundreds of years ago that Gundebold held that last feast and cast to his hound the beggar's portion of his own Twelfth-loaf, yet folk declare that still each year he walks the roads of Burgundy, and even our own province of Bourbonnaise. And those there be who de-

clare he has knocked at their doors. It is said, moreover, that his once handsome though wicked face has grown sharp and pinched, and in his deep-set burning eyes there is the look of the hunted creatures of the forest. So the name of Wolf once given to him because of his wild and cruel ways now seems more than ever to belong to him, for he bears in his face the stamp of the wolves. It is said, too, that the wolves themselves feel that he belongs to them, and that having lost his old comrades, he follows with them; and when he wanders through the forests he passes unharmed among the snarling pack, for he is almost as one of

them. That is what I meant, Pepin, when I said mayhap his four-footed companions were calling him to-night. Hark!"

And as again from the wintry forest behind their hut echoed the far-away howling of wolves, Grandfather, putting his arm around Pepin, drew him close to his side; and so they sat, neither speaking. Presently, when the sound from the forest had quite died away, Pepin, who had hidden his face in Grandfather's blue blouse, looked up; and, "Grandfather," he whispered, "did you ever see Duke Gundebold?"

"Nay, lad!" replied Grandfather,

with a shiver, and hastening to cross himself. "And the good God grant I never may!"

"Did you say that when Gundebold begs for God's Share, no one gives it to him?" went on Pepin in a puzzled voice.

"Yes, child," replied Grandfather, "but they suffer no blame who deny him, for to ask in hunger and weariness yet never receive is the punishment of Gundebold for his scorn and hardness of heart toward those who begged at his own door. Those of whom he asks declare that, though willingly they would give to him the beggar's portion of their Twelfth-loaf, yet when

they would offer it to him a something stays their hand, and so these hundreds of years folk have come to understand that it is the will of God that they refuse him. But of course, though they must refuse the Wolf, they take good care to give their beggar's portion to some other wayfarer, and not to crumble it to the dogs as did Gundebold."

When Grandfather had ended, the two sat quietly for awhile, looking into the fire and thinking of the old tale of the unhappy Duke. By and by, when there came a knock at the door of the hut, both started; and Pepin did not run as usual to undo the latch, but shrank back.

"There, there, little one," said Grandfather, "do not be afraid. If it is Gundebold himself he will do thee no harm, but only will he ask for yonder bit of our loaf." And Grandfather glanced toward the pewter plate still standing on the deal table, as he went to open the door himself. Nevertheless, his hand trembled a bit as he lifted the latch, and he gave a little sigh of relief when he saw no one without but old Gules the beggar, whom all the country folk knew. "Come in, Gules," said Grandfather kindly, "and eat thy share of our Twelfth-loaf beside the hearth, for 'tis a bitter wind blowing."

When Pepin saw who was their visitor, he hastened to make a place for him on the bench by the fire and took Gules' staff and helped him undo his cloak. Then when the old man had seated himself and warmed his hands before the blaze, Grandfather placed on his knees the pewter plate and bade him eat, and welcome, of their loaf and the bit of cheese he had added to it.

"I have just been telling Pepin here the story of Gundebold the Wolf," said Grandfather, "and when thy knock came, Gules, he feared 'twas the wicked Duke. Didst thou not, Pepin?" and Grandfather smiled as Pepin busied

himself with the fire but said nothing.

"Yes, yes," muttered old Gules presently, as finishing the loaf he pushed the plate from him. "I trow Gundebold has learned by now how hard is the lot of the beggar; and 'tis well. Wicked enough he was and earned his punishment!" And Gules nodded his head approvingly, for the beggars had little sympathy for the Wolf.

"Hast thou ever seen him?" asked Pepin, whose mind was full of the story.

"Nay, child," replied Gules, crossing himself as had Grandfather. "I hope 'tis in his own Burgundy he

walks this night; though twice or thrice as I passed along the road it almost seemed he must be in our Bourbonnaise forest yonder. Hark!" And again came the long-drawn snarling wail on the winter wind. "Didst not thou mark how the wolves have been howling?"

"Yes," whispered Pepin fearfully. "Dost thou think he is with them there, Gules?"

"Who knows, who knows?" muttered the old man, beginning to nod sleepily, for he was very tired. Seeing this, Grandfather bade Pepin fetch some straw from the little shed back of the hut, and together they spread a bed on the floor so their

beggar guest might pass the night beneath the shelter of their roof.

When Gules had settled himself and Grandfather had spread his cloak over him, he and Pepin sat awhile longer dreaming by the fire and then they, too, crept into bed. Soon the little hut became very quiet, and the Twelfth Night darkness grew still deeper, though still from the depths of the forest came the snarling cry of the wolves.

IV

SCARCELY had the winter worn away after that Twelfth Night when Grandfather and Pepin and old Gules the beggar sat by the fire and talked of Gundebold the Wolf, when a great change came into the life of the little lad. Grandfather fell ill; and though Pepin did his best to tend and wait upon him, day by day he grew weaker and weaker, and harder was the task of the lad who had none to help him. 'Twas a pity that Duke Loys, who would have aided them, was still in Paris; and the steward and others whom he

left in charge of his castle, and whom he trusted to look after his peasant folk, deceived him and took little heed of how matters went with the poor vinedressers and tillers of the soil. This troubled Grandfather greatly, for he felt his strength failing, and knew the end was not far off; and then what would become of Pepin? Day after day the kind old man grew whiter and thinner; and at last one bleak morning in March when the snow was still filling the sky, Grandfather called Pepin to him. As the boy stood at his bedside, Grandfather looked at him long and tenderly; in silence and for the last time laying his trembling hand

on Pepin's head, he blest him and bade him keep a brave heart. Then he told him to seek out Duke Loys as soon as he returned to his castle, and the good Duke would surely befriend him and perhaps give him a place to serve there. When Grandfather closed his eyes, he lay so white and still that Pepin, crying bitterly, knew he would never wake again.

Poor little lad: he had indeed lost his best friend, and very forlorn and sorrowful he felt as he stood by Grandfather's grave in the churchyard of Bourbonnaise village, and watched them place the white wooden cross at its head. But he tried hard to keep a brave heart, as

Grandfather had wished; so, brushing aside his tears as best he might, he gathered a little cluster of scarlet rose-hips that pricked through the snow in one corner of the churchyard, and hanging these on the white cross, he moved away. But where? One of the Bourbonnaise women, who had stood by as the village priest read the service for the dead, pitied Pepin, and, "Where art thou going, my child?" she asked.

Pepin turned to her a white little face, and answered vaguely, "Home, I am going home."

"But thou canst not stay alone," went on the kindly dame. "Thou hadst better come with me."

But Pepin shrank back. Still was the little thatched hut home to him, the only one he knew. "Nay," he answered simply, "I think I will go home."

The village dame, though of kindly heart, did not press the matter, for her home was small and it sheltered many children and mouths to feed. So Pepin made his lonely way back to the brown hut by the forest. And desolate enough he found it. Everywhere he turned he missed Grandfather's kindly face and voice; for hours would he sit on the bench by the hearth, brooding over his loss, his eyes blurred with tears. Then he would rouse from his

grieving and try to busy himself with getting in order all the tools which Grandfather had used about his work; "for I will work among the vines, too, as soon as it is spring," he would say to himself. But each day his strength grew less, for though there was still a little supply of coarse meal in their bin and some cabbage for soup still in their earthen storehouse, the poor lad had little wish for food. Pepin could not go on living in this way, and soon another of Duke Loys' vinedressers moved into the hut which was better than his own, and Pepin, who still clung to the place, had companionship. Still was he

very unhappy. For the vinedresser's family was large; and though they suffered Pepin to stay, they were not kind to him and he felt he was not welcome. He strove to keep out of the way as much as he could, and day after day as they treated him more harshly still, he would creep into his little corner of the hut, scarcely touching the bit of bread they grudgingly gave him, his heart fairly bursting with grief as he remembered the loving care with which Grandfather had watched over him.

As the spring drew on and the violets and May-buds began to blossom in the fields and meadows, and

cuckoos and starlings sang from the forest, all the world seemed to brighten into joyous life; but it brought no joy to Pepin, who had grown so pale and thin he seemed scarcely the same lad as he wandered about, barely noticing the birds and flowers he had once so loved. At last he could bear it no longer; so one day, gathering together his little belongings, pitifully few, he set out from the hut. No one noticed him, save two of the vinedresser's children, Marie and little Guil who dearly loved Pepin, though their parents had treated him unkindly. They ran after him, calling, "Pepin, Pepin! Art thou going away?"

And little Marie, the younger one, began to cry.

At this Pepin turned and put his arms around them and kissed them good-bye, brushing his hand across his own eyes as he turned away, feeling he was leaving his only friends. As Pepin left them, there was such a strange far-away look in his eyes that the children stood quite still, watching him in wondering silence as slowly he made his way across the fields to the highroad. When he reached this, a little while he stood anxiously looking up and down as it curved away in the distance, much as he had done that Twelfth Day morning when he had run out so

happily with his little offerings for the Three Kings. Only this time Pepin watched the road, not listening for the tinkling of camel bells but wondering in which direction to turn his steps. First he thought he would go to the old town of Angers; perhaps he might find something there he could do to earn his bit of bread. But as he looked wistfully toward the misty distance, and thought of the miles he must walk to reach Angers, his heart failed him; for poor Pepin had little strength left. At last, with a sigh, he turned his face toward the village of Bourbonnaise which, you know, nestled under the castle crag not so far away. For

lonely though Pepin felt, he would rather have gone to Angers where no one knew him than to Bourbonnaise. To be sure, as the lad had passed his short life in his home and seldom had he come to the village, few of the folk there knew him, but he feared that these might think he should go back to the thatched hut where he had been so unhappy; and this he determined not to do.

As now the little boy, carrying his small bundle, trudged wearily down the road, very heavy was his heart. He wondered if after all he would be obliged to beg his bread, and he thought much of old Gules; and especially of Baron Gundebold, home-

less and friendless, who must wander about the world for hundreds of years. And as he thought of them, more and more did Pepin's tender heart swell with pity for the unhappy lot of all beggars; for, as I have told thee, there were many in France in those days.

When the lad reached Bourbonnaise, slowly he walked along its narrow crooked street. Here and there children were playing, and women sat in open doorways industriously knitting or making ready the vegetables for the pots of soup which would be the chief meal for their families. One of these dames, glancing up as he passed, saw Pepin, and

noticed his forlorn look. "Good-day, my child," she said kindly. And then, looking more sharply at him, "Art not thou the lad whose Grandfather was buried in the churchyard last spring?"

"Yes, Madame," faltered Pepin, taking off his ragged cap. For Grandfather had taught him the manners he himself had learned at the castle.

"Where art thou going?" went on the dame.

"I — I am looking for something to do," replied Pepin; adding eagerly, "Hast thou any work for me? I could weed your garden or carry faggots, or — or mend pruning

tools —" Here he paused, trying hard to think what other service he could do.

As the village dame looked at the poor child, who seemed scarcely to have strength to carry his little bundle, yet who was so eager for work, her heart melted with pity, though she had but little to offer him save a bowl of soup and a bit of bread; and this she hastened to bring out, after bidding him wait by the doorstep. "There, little one," she said, "eat this and 'twill strengthen thee for thy work." And she smiled a little sadly. "What is thy name, child?"

"Pepin," replied the boy, simply.

And then as he sat on the step as he was bidden and ate the soup and bread, for he was very hungry, he shrank as the dame questioned him again.

"Where hast thou been living?"

"In our hut by the forest," answered Pepin slowly. "Grandfather was vinedresser and woodcutter for Duke Loys."

"Yes," said the dame, trying to recall something of the lad's family. "But thou couldst not stay alone after thy Grandfather was gone. There was no other of thy kinsfolk there, I think?" And she looked at him questioningly.

"Nay," replied Pepin, "there was

HE WAS VERY HUNGRY

no one but Grandfather. And," he added timidly, and in a low voice, "after he was gone I did stay alone for a long time." For the time had seemed very long to him. "I stayed by myself till the other vinedresser's family came to live in the hut."

"And couldst thou not stay there still?" again queried the dame. "Did they turn thee out?"

Pepin hung his head, for this was what he had dreaded, that they would ask him why he had left the hut, and would blame him.

"Nay," at last he faltered, "they let me stay, but there was no room for me and they did not want me." And his eyes filled with tears.

Here a neighbor woman who had stepped across the narrow street to see the stranger lad and who had overheard some of the talk, spoke up sharply — she had a harsh face — "Art thou sure thou hast not disobeyed them? Mayhap thou wert punished and it angered thee so thou hast run away. Thou hadst best be sent back where thou hast a roof to shelter thee, for thou wilt find few enough in this village who can take thee in." And the sharp-tongued dame, with another frown at Pepin, turned about and went to her own home, where, had she been more kindly, she might have taken the poor

boy; for she had no children of her own and lived alone.

When she had gone, Pepin, whose heart was too full to speak, turned so miserable a face toward the dame who had befriended him that she gathered him in her arms and kissed his forehead. Her heart warmed toward the gentle, forlorn lad. "Poor child," she said, "I believe thee, and I would I had a place for thee here, but there are many of us, and thou seest our home is small." And the good dame looked troubled. "Nevertheless," she added in a moment, brightening up, "thou canst stay with us for a while. Thou

shalt share our soup and bread and I will make a place for thee to sleep on the floor, and luckily 'tis not cold. Then by and by thou wilt make other friends, and perhaps thou canst find a bit of work to do, so by the time winter comes thou wilt be better sheltered."

Pepin gave her a look full of gratitude, and though his voice quavered a little he tried to speak bravely. "If only I may stay with you I will do all I can to help you. Is there not something I can do now?" And he rose to his feet and looked anxiously about him, for Pepin was an industrious lad and had no mind to live on charity.

"Well," said the dame, smiling at his eagerness, "thou canst carry thy empty soup-bowl into the house and, if baby Jean is awake, rock his cradle; and then thou canst rest a bit, for I think thou hast walked far. By and by I will find other work for thee."

And this was the beginning of Pepin's life of nigh to two years in the village of Bourbonnaise. Good dame Poupar who had first taken him into her home was always his friend and helped him as best she could. But, as she had said, already was her little house filled with her own children and she had need of all her thrift to feed them. Pepin, on his part, did all he could to help

about the work, all the while seeking tasks elsewhere. These he found in different homes in the village and in this way tried to earn his bit of food and little corner in which to sleep. Sometimes at night he crept into the loft of some humble cottage, or slept on the straw of the pen where the goats huddled together. Sometimes, if it was very cold, one of the village lads would share his sheepskin cover with him; for the children all loved him. Indeed, so did most of the grown folk, for that matter; though those there were who looked askance at him and wagged their heads and declared that he ought to go back and be satisfied to stay in

the vinedresser's hut whence he had come.

Pepin himself was oftentimes scarcely less unhappy in the village than he had been in the hut he had left. He was a sensitive lad and felt that, after all, he was only a waif; and though he worked hard, he could scarcely earn his food and shelter and had no home he could call his own. He had led a solitary life there with Grandfather, and never had he been used to playmates, and now the tasks with which he tried always to busy himself left him but scant time to mingle with the village children; yet, as I told thee, they all loved him.

Always was he kind and gentle with them, and there was no broken plaything but Pepin's deft fingers could mend; for helping Grandfather with his pruning tools had given him much skill of hand. Oftentimes when he sat on some village doorstep working over a broken toy brought to him by some little one, such a far-away look filled his eyes that the other children gazed at him wonderingly. Yet though he spoke but little and seldom joined their play, they liked nothing better than to nestle close to him if he sat at work, or to run along beside him as he went from place to place. To be sure, he would smile at them and

now and then he played with them; but there was such a sadness in the little lad's smile that it would have gone to thy heart hadst thou seen him, and even his play gave him little pleasure. Pepin was miserably lonely and unhappy, though he tried always to keep the brave heart and to comfort himself with dreams of what he would do when a man grown.

In this way the months dragged on till Grandfather had been dead for more than a year; and still Pepin led the life of a waif, carrying his little bundle from house to house in the village and staying a brief while wherever he found employ-

ment. Why did he not seek out Duke Loys, as Grandfather had bidden him? That was because the long illness of the French king still afflicted him, and important affairs of the kingdom kept many of the great noblemen, among them Duke Loys, in the city of Paris. True, Duke Loys had been back to his castle a few times for a short while, but each time before Pepin could pluck up courage to try to see him, he had been again called to Paris. And poor Pepin had been obliged to look wistfully up the crag where rose the great castle towers, and content himself with his dreams.

V

It was the second winter since Pepin had been left alone, and the lad was still homeless as before. The ground was covered with snow and it was bitterly cold, truly a hard time for the poor. The village folk were thankful to keep fire on their hearths and bread on their tables, and Pepin was glad to find shelter, for he had found it harder than he had thought to make his way; he was a little lad of only ten years.

About this time word came to the castle that Duke Loys was soon coming home for a long stay, and the

welcome news soon spread through the village. Everybody longed for the kind rule of their good master, except those he had left in the castle, who had served him ill while he was away. All hoped, too, that he would come before the Christmas time, for his bounty always made the blessed season a happier one for the village folk. Yet to their great disappointment Christmas came without bringing Duke Loys, though preparations had been made in the castle to receive him. The great hall was hung with green garlands and on the dais, where stood the Duke's carved chair of state, was laid a crimson carpet. In the lower part of the hall polished

boards had been placed upon trestles, thus making long tables which all day were kept spread with food for any of the village folk who might choose to come. This custom of the castle the steward durst not overlook as he had done the year before, for Duke Loys was expected at any moment, and the people at the castle well knew that he would be angry if he came home and found that his villagers had not been bidden to his table. But few of these except the poorest cared to climb the crag to the castle door, for the steward, having been long in authority there, had grown haughty, and the Bourbonnaise folk declared he treated them

as beggars instead of giving the warm welcome and kindly smile with which Duke Loys always greeted them.

But all this was soon to be changed, for two days before the old year went out Duke Loys came home. He had hoped to reach Bourbonnaise at the beginning of the holiday season, but had been delayed on the way; for in those days the journey from the old city of Paris must be made by coach or horseback and the roads were often uncared for and beset with many dangers. But at last the Duke's outriders galloped through Bourbonnaise on their way to the castle and the village

folk cheered them heartily, knowing the coach would soon follow, bearing their beloved master. And sure enough, in a short while came the six horses sending the snow flying in flaky clouds about them as they dashed along the narrow, crooked street, dragging behind them the great coach in which sat Duke Loys wrapped in a fur mantle and smiling and bowing to the fresh cheers of the villagers. "Long live Duke Loys! Long live Duke Loys the Good!" they shouted, and their master smiled again. Opening his coach door, he waved his hand in friendly greeting.

Pepin, who was working for a

time for Maitre Gaston, the village carpenter, ran to the door of the little shop to see, but caught only a glimpse of the great coach, with its panels gilded and painted with the ducal crest, and its footman and driver in green coats with many silver buttons. "Oh," said the lad, "how grand everything is!"

"Yes, indeed," echoed Maitre Gaston, "'tis a noble lord, and right glad I am he has come back. I trow there will be some changes in yonder castle when Duke Loys governs his own again."

And sure enough, when the good Duke learned how things had been going in his absence he quickly dis-

missed the serving folk who had not obeyed his bidding, and again the castle doors were thrown open in hospitable welcome to the humblest villagers as to his noblest friends. And when the New Year came in, and to celebrate the day, Duke Loys made a feast for the village folk, and all the peasants who tilled his lands and served on his estate gladly flocked to the castle to enjoy the good cheer and to give their master their loyal greeting. And Duke Loys had a smile and a kindly welcome for all, and seemed as pleased as they to be among them again.

And was Pepin there with the others? No, he had stayed in the

carpenter shop. That was not because Maitre Gaston had wished him to do so, but because the lad himself had refused to go to the castle. When the old carpenter was making himself ready for the feast and had brushed his threadbare blouse, "Come, Pepin," he said, "put away the tools, for we must soon be going."

But Pepin had hung his head, and, "If you please, sir," he faltered, "I — I would rather stay here."

"Stay here!" repeated Maitre Gaston in amazement. "Not go to Duke Loys' feast! And why not?"

Pepin flushed as he looked down at his faded and ragged little smock,

and then at his cap with a great hole in it, hanging from a wooden peg by the door. "If you please, Maitre Gaston, I — I would rather not go, because — because I am so ragged."

At this the old carpenter, whose eyesight was not so good as it had been, blinked and stared at the lad. "True," he said presently, "perhaps thy smock does need a bit of mending. But never mind, child. Do thou come along with me."

But Pepin still shook his head; for he had a stubborn pride. He had tried his best to mend his tattered garments, but he had not the deft touch of Grandfather, who had kept him looking as neat as might his own

mother. Dame Poupar had tried to help him when she could, but her own family of children had kept her so busy of late that she had found scant time to look after another. And now as Pepin looked at his rags, he could not bear the thought of going to the castle and mingling with the village folk in their holiday finery.

Maitre Gaston, seeing Pepin was really unwilling to go, did not urge him. "Well, well, child," he said, blinking again, "I am sorry thou wilt not go with me; for I am minded to give my greeting to Duke Loys and to taste a bit of castle fare." And the old carpenter's mouth

watered as he thought of the good cheer which he knew would be bountifully spread for the villagers. But poor Pepin, though hungry enough himself, could not be tempted by the feast; his shyness had not worn off and he knew he would rather stay alone than risk being laughed at, perhaps by the servants at the castle. He did not know that had any of them dared to do so unkind a thing, Duke Loys would instantly have reproved him.

So, getting Maitre Gaston's cap for him, he opened the door for the master, and, though he could not help but look a bit longingly after him as the old man hobbled off, he

resolutely turned and, shutting the door again, busied himself about the little shop.

It was late in the day when Maitre Gaston returned, his face beaming with happiness. Pepin took his cap and staff and laid a fresh stock of wood on the hearth. As the old man seated himself, and stretched his feet and warmed his hands at the fire, he gave a sigh of comfort. "Thou art a good lad," he said, looking toward Pepin, "and a warm hearth is a comfort to come home to, for 'tis a chill walk from yonder snowy crag." And Maitre Gaston shivered a bit and drew closer to the blaze. "Nevertheless," he added, "I wish thou

couldst have been there, child. Duke Loys was so kind and gracious to everybody; and then the feast! Such great meat pasties and loaves of white bread and wonderful things you would not even know the names of!" And here the old carpenter fell to describing the hospitality of the castle till the poor lad looked very forlorn and miserable, as the thought of his own poverty and loneliness swept over him.

Maitre Gaston babbled on, and presently Pepin, whose thoughts had been wandering, listened more sharply as the old man said, "Duke Loys asked many questions about us village folk and in particular about

the children, and whether there were any little lads orphaned since he had gone away, and of whom he had not heard. And I told him of thee, Pepin, and of how thou art a good industrious lad but over young to be forced to earn thine own bread."

"Oh, Maitre Gaston," cried Pepin, in dismay, "I want so much to serve in the castle and now he will think me too young! Didst thou tell him I wished to take service there?"

"Why, no," said Maitre Gaston, blinking again in surprise. "Art thou not satisfied here, child?" For the old man had grown fond of the child and did not like the thought of parting from him.

"Thou art very good to me, Maitre Gaston," said Pepin slowly, trying to hide his disappointment, for while he was grateful to the carpenter for sheltering him he could not love him as he had Grandfather. "But," he went on, "Grandfather bade me see him and he would befriend me; so I must go to the castle, perhaps to-morrow, if thou canst spare me from the shop, and see if he will give me some work to do. Grandfather wished me to serve in the castle as he had done when he was a boy."

"Yes, yes," said Maitre Gaston with a sigh, "I told Duke Loys who thy Grandfather was. He remem-

bered how he had served his father, Duke François, when he himself was a lad, and how he was ever well thought of. And then he asked more questions concerning thee; for he said others had told him thou wert a worthy little lad. So if thou wishest, I doubt not he will give thee service in his household; though I should be sorry to lose thee, child. Yes, yes." And the poor old carpenter nodded so sadly that Pepin's tender heart quite melted.

"Maitre Gaston," he said, "if you do not wish me to leave you, I will not try for a place in the castle. It was only because of Grandfather's wish that I thought to ask Duke

Loys; but I will not go away till there is someone else to help. Dame Poupar wants her boy Jean to learn to be a carpenter. He will be old enough next summer to begin to work, and I am sure he would be glad to come to you. But I will not leave you now, Maitre Gaston. And perhaps, if I asked, there would be no place for me in the castle." And Pepin sighed.

"Nay, lad," replied Maitre Gaston, "I would not keep thee here if thou canst better thy lot, for 'tis poor enough beneath this roof."

But Pepin declared he would not leave Maitre Gaston alone, and the end of it was that the old man

patted Pepin's head and as they sat by the fire his face brightened again and he talked long, telling the lad of the wonderful things he had seen at the castle.

So a week passed and Twelfth day came. Pepin, though he had no sweetmeats to offer the Three Wise Kings, had nevertheless run out with the other children of the village to look for the faraway travelers. But, alas, no one had seen them; for, as always before, the children had not watched the right road, so their elders told them, and the Kings had passed by another way; nor had they stopped at Duke Loys' castle as Pepin had once thought they might

do. If they had, they would have found a warm welcome and plenty of good cheer; for Duke Loys was to give a feast to his noble friends that night, and in the castle kitchen the cooks were running about making ready for it. Little dogs, harnessed to great spits on which many kinds of meat were roasting, were going back and forth and so turning them before the blazing fire on the hearth. The huge Twelfth-loaf was being kneaded into shape and scullions were busy scouring and polishing the gold and silver dishes, the flagons and cups that were to set out the duke's table. In the great hall this was being spread, and Duke

Loys himself was going about with a pleased smile seeing that all preparations were being made to receive his guests.

Down in the village most of the folk kept holiday; but Maitre Gaston worked in his little shop as long as he could see, for the winter was always a hard season for him, and right glad he was for the bench and chairs which the inn-keeper had brought to be mended; for the inn-keeper had had many guests the night before who had fought and quarreled and broken his furniture with the quarter-staffs and staves wherewith they had sought to crack each other's bones. As the lad Pepin

waited upon Maitre Gaston at his work, the day wore on towards evensong, and then there came riding into the village a groom from Duke Loys' stable, mounted upon a black horse of Norman strain, the shaggy hoofs of the sturdy beast printing the snow to a brisk trot. Down the crooked street rode the groom, pausing not till he reached the shop of the carpenter. Making fast his rein to a wrought iron ring in a flagstone by the door — Pepin, seeing him, had flung the door wide open — he strode within, clapping together his chilled fingers and then spreading out his palms before the fire. "Good-day, Maitre Gaston," he

said, "or better, Good-even, for the sun is nigh setting." The old carpenter was blinking with surprise at his visitor, whom he knew from his livery to be in the Duke's service. Then, glancing toward Pepin, the groom added, "Is this the lad Pepin? Duke Loys hath sent me to fetch him."

At this the lad gave a little cry of pleasure, for most keen he was to serve in the castle. But he remembered his promise to Maitre Gaston, and his face fell. He fought bravely and stood by his word, and "Maitre Gaston," he said, "I will not leave you till Jean Poupar comes to help you."

"There, there, child," said the old carpenter, "never thou mind about Jean Poupar. Thou must go when Duke Loys sends for thee."

"Yea," broke in the groom, not knowing the need of Maitre Gaston, "'tis not mannerly to hold back when Duke Loys bids thee come. Dost thou not wish to go to the castle?" he added, bewildered.

But Maitre Gaston was already hurrying Pepin to the chest where were the lad's few belongings. Making these up in a bundle, he led the lad to the groom, saying, "Here is the boy, and I know not a better or a kinder-hearted one. I am sure he will serve our good Duke well and

faithfully." Here the old man patted Pepin and a tear stood in his eye, and I doubt not in that of the lad, too, as they said good-bye.

The groom swung him up in the saddle in front of him. Pepin, who in all his life had not till then felt the back of a horse, said never a word, but shut his eyes and held on for dear life as the Norman beast broke into a trot. Then the groom, smiling to himself, thrust his strong hand through the leathern belt of the lad's smock, so holding him firmly, and thus they rode up the steep snowy height, across the drawbridge and into the courtyard of Duke Loys' castle. When they dis-

mounted, the groom, who had whispered to Pepin to whip off his cap for manner's sake, instead of leading him to the castle kitchens as Pepin expected, took him to the door of the great hall where he gave him over to a seneschal, who in turn conducted the lad to Duke Loys himself.

Now, the Duke's handsome carved chair of state stood at one end of the hall on a dais covered with scarlet cloth; it stood alone, for though his courtiers thought it great pity, their master was yet unwed. So there being no lady duchess to look to the preparations for the coming feast, the good Duke himself was pacing about the hall, noting with pleasure the

green garlands decking the high walls, the great logs blazing in the huge fireplaces at either end of it, and the serving men placing down its length the trestles and boards on which would rest the long table. Piles of snow-white damask linen lay ready for the clothing of it; and Duke Loys, having seen them spread and given directions for the proper setting of some of the jeweled cups and flagons, turned about; and there stood the seneschal and the lad Pepin awaiting his pleasure. Right kindly did he greet the boy and, taking his cold hands between his own warm palms, led him to one of the roaring fires, bidding him thaw the numbness

from his body — and in particular from his lips, the Duke added with a smile, for the child had scarce opened his mouth, so shy he was and bewildered with the grandeur around him.

Presently, when he was warmed, Duke Loys questioned him about himself and Grandfather, and when Pepin had answered as best he was able for shyness, he added timidly, "Please you, sir, I am ready now to serve in your kitchen or wherever you would have me work," and he stood fingering nervously his ragged cap from which the tassel had long since vanished.

Duke Loys looked at the lad a moment with an odd expression, and

then, "Yes, child," he replied, nodding his head, "but 'tis time enough. The cooks now are busy making ready the feast, and the morrow a new serving lad would be more hindrance than help. Thou canst bide here and watch the laying of yonder table. I doubt not thou wilt find it a pretty sight." Then noting the lad's dismay as he looked down at his ragged smock and wooden shoes, "Never thou mind," he said kindly, "'tis no matter thou art not in holiday bravery. There is a little nook where thou canst stay and see and none will be the wiser." And he pointed to a small seat built into the wall beneath a high narrow window.

A piece of rich tapestry hung partly in front of the nook and Pepin, obeying Duke Loys' command, went thither and seated himself, trying as best he might to hide behind the tapestry, though withal the lad was so dazed and bewildered at being bidden to bide in the hall, he scarce knew what he did.

VI

After remaining concealed behind the tapestry for a little while, Pepin plucked up courage to peep from his nook, and soon so taken up he was with watching the furnishings of the tables and gazing about the great vaulted room that he forgot all else. And truly it was a splendid sight; presently, as the dusk deepened, the torches were lighted, flaring from silver sockets set up and down the walls; and how the gold and silver platters and tankards shone and sparkled against the white damask linen of the long table! At one end

it was raised somewhat to fit the dais where at other times it was the custom of Duke Loys to sit as host, though always at Twelfth Night revels he gave over his throne to whomsoever the bean in the Twelfth-loaf should proclaim Lord of the Feast; for thou who readest must remember how I have said that the noble folk were fond of making thus in sport a mimic ruler of the lord or dame to whom fell the lucky portion of the Twelfth-loaf, and the King or Queen of the Bean until the revel ended was obeyed as if in very truth our gracious monarch himself. So Duke Loys' throne stood ready for its ruler, and on the cloth in

front of it stood a golden plate and a flagon and goblet of gold all of Moorish workmanship, cunningly chased and sparkling with jewels; it had been fetched from Palestine by the brave crusader forbears of the Good Duke.

As the lad Pepin saw all these things and remembered how Grandfather had told him of the lordly life led by the noble folk and of the fine things in their castles, he knew as never before how true had been the old man's word when he had many times declared that the little peasant lad did not dream of the wonder of it. And then, after a while, Duke Loys' guests began to come; and if

Pepin had stared before, he did now with all his might. As one by one their furred cloaks and mantles were put by and they paced into the hall, soon it was ablaze with color, for all were arrayed in their finest garments to honor Duke Loys' feast. Very splendid looked the noble lords in velvet coats and breeches, lace ruffles falling over their knuckles and diamonds sparkling from their shoes. While as for the dames and demoiselles, lovely indeed were they as they trailed about in cloth of gold and brocaded taffeta from the looms of Lyons, jewels glittering at wrist and throat, while from their pointed head-dresses floated scarfs of filmy

tissue sewn with pearls and golden spangles.

Duke Loys had a smile and gracious welcome for each, and as Pepin watched the noble company, more and more he shrank into his corner behind the tapestry, for he was sure by this time that the good Duke had forgotten him, else he would have sent him from the hall before the coming of the guests; and though the lad would have given much to slip quietly away, he dared not stir until commanded to do so.

When all the company were come, one of Duke Loys' pages bore his master's order to the kitchen folk, and presently, to the sound of shrill

piping, the door opened leading from the buttery into the banquet hall and in came a procession such as Pepin had never seen the like of. First walked a little page clad all in scarlet and blowing a silver horn, and after him came two more pages playing on flageolets, and very fine they looked in their blue tunics all embroidered in silver, their white breeches and short capes of scarlet. Behind them was the castle steward bearing a huge silver platter on which rested the Twelfth-loaf; around it was a garland of laurel tied with ribbons of Lyons taffeta which hung in long streamers to the floor. The steward lifted the platter high so all

could see it, and there was merriment and laughter and clapping of hands as the guests greeted it. Then he placed it on the table before Duke Loys' chair so that it might be divided before the feast began, and the king or queen of the evening discovered. For the mimic throne was waiting for the lucky finder of the bean who was to rule the others till midnight. The little pages stood behind him and piped and played as Duke Loys cut the loaf, leaving a generous piece for God's Share; when he had finished, he directed the steward to pass the platter among his guests, and again there was much happy laughter as the pages going

before the steward played merrily as each received his portion.

When all the noble company had been served, besides God's Share there was still a portion left, and Duke Loys, signing to the steward and to the pages to follow him, stepped to the window nook and lifted the tapestry behind which Pepin was hidden. "Come forth, lad," he said kindly. "Receive thy portion of the Twelfth-loaf, and try thy luck with the bean." Then, as the pages struck up their merry little tune and the steward held before him the silver platter, Duke Loys, stooping down, took Pepin's hand in his and drew him to his feet, for in

truth what with amazement and confusion the boy seemed as one turned to stone.

Slowly Pepin gazed from one to another of those around him, at the Duke and the steward and the piping pages and then at the guests who had gathered near, watching curiously the ragged waif whom Duke Loys had brought into his hall. The lad looked, but as one in a dream, scarce seeing, so bewildered he was to find himself in the midst of that gay company. Then as he stood motionless, "Lad," whispered the steward, still holding the silver platter before him, "take thy portion of the loaf, as Duke Loys bids thee."

"TRY THY LUCK WITH THE BEAN"

At this, Pepin roused a little, though still scarcely knowing what he did; and, reaching out his hand, he took the portion which lay beside God's Share. And so he stood with downcast eyes, timidly holding it, while his face grew scarlet as he looked at his ragged cap which had fallen to the floor at his feet.

Duke Loys, still standing beside him, waved his hand to the company and said with a smile, "Now, my friends, let us see who is to be our ruler this night!" For the lords and ladies had courteously waited till all were served before tasting their part of the loaf. As now, at this signal from Duke Loys, they began to break

and eat of the loaf, the great hall was filled with their chatter and laughter as each sought to find the bean, but with no success. Presently the Good Duke turned to Pepin, still standing with downcast eyes and holding his portion in his trembling hand. "Do thou taste thy bit of the loaf, child," said the duke. "Mayhap thy luck will be better than our noble guests have found."

Pepin raised his eyes which were misty with bewilderment; but hearing Duke Loys command that he eat of the loaf, he broke a bit and was about to lay it to his lips when suddenly, where he had broken the bread, out dropped a bean and fell

to the polished floor with a little pit-a-pat. At this, lords and ladies set up a shout of "long live the King!" and began to clap their hands and curtsey to the ragged little lad, for they saw that Duke Loys had specially chosen him from his kindness of heart and pity for the poor; as indeed he had. For though on these Twelfth Night feasts among the nobles no one before had done so, the thought had come to Duke Loys that in keeping in memory the day when the Three Kings came to worship the little Jesus it was fitting to choose for king of the feast a poor and humble child, even as our little Lord himself,

though King of all, was poor and lowly as He lay there in the manger of Bethlehem. To be sure, a few of the noble company were disappointed and envious, having hoped to find the bean in their own portion, but for the most part the lords and ladies bent the knee right willingly to poor Pepin, and none swept the floor with a more worshipful curtsey than did the good Duke Loys himself. As for the lad thus made lord of the revel, he stood in the centre of the hall, whither he had been drawn, still holding the bit of Twelfth-loaf in his shaking hands, his eyes filled with wonder and amazement as he gazed from one to

another of those crowding around him.

Duke Loys was about to summon a page to conduct Pepin up the turret stair to a chamber where he might be arrayed as befitted his royal rank, when suddenly, *Tap*, *tap*, there sounded a knock at the great oaken door of the hall. Pierre, the castle seneschal, hastened to unbar and fling it open; and there, as he expected, stood a beggar wrapped in a tattered cloak. Without speaking, the stranger put forth his hand for God's Share; but before the seneschal could turn to bring the platter, a ray of light from one of the torches fastened to the wall fell across the

beggar's face, and the seneschal drew back, half closing the door and crossing himself with a little cry of terror. Duke Loys, hearing this half-smothered cry and noticing the man's white face, said, with a smile, "What, Pierre! Is it Duke Gundebold himself who begs our bounty?" This he said, little dreaming that it was so, but only to twit Pierre for his fright.

But when Pierre, unable to speak, only nodded his head, Duke Loys himself seized the platter where lay God's Share of the loaf, and strode to the door, again flinging it wide open. But even as Pierre had done, when he beheld the face of the beg-

gar, he shrank back. It was indeed Duke Gundebold who stood on the threshold; his sharp wolfish features and burning eyes, once seen, could never be mistaken for those of another. Dost thou ask how this could be, seeing that thrice a hundred years had come and gone since Gundebold flung God's Share to the hound at his feet? I can but answer that I know not; only am I telling the tale as folk declared it happened. Duke Loys strove to master his fear, and though all knew the story of the unhappy Gundebold and that it was his punishment to hunger each Twelfth Night yet never receive the beggar's portion, nevertheless Duke

Loys, because of the kindness of his heart, though scarce knowing what he did, strove still to offer the bread to the unwelcome visitor. But it was not to be so. As he extended the platter towards Gundebold, something seemed to strike it from his hand, so that it fell to the floor with a clattering sound.

The look of hopeless bitterness deepened in Gundebold's face, for thus it had ever been. It was his doom on this night to beg his bread, yet must his hunger remain unsatisfied. He was about to turn away, when suddenly he heard his name called in a child's voice. The lad Pepin, shy and timid though he was,

had done a most unlooked-for thing. For this is often the case with the shyest of people; when something touches their hearts deeply they will do something quickly which afterwards perhaps surprises themselves as much as others. And so it was with Pepin. Hearing the name of Gundebold, he seemed to rouse from his dream. The tale Grandfather had told him that night when the wolves had howled around the little hut in the forest was still fresh in his mind, and the pity he had then felt for the sorely punished Gundebold was now a hundred fold stronger since he himself had known hunger and suffering.

As now he saw the unhappy beggar about to turn away (for all were watching the door with white faces and hushed voices), forgetting everything except that the once proud lord could not receive even the beggar's portion, he stepped quickly to the door "Wait, Duke Gundebold," he called in a clear but trembling voice; then holding up his own share of the loaf, which you remember he had been about to lay to his lips when the *tap*, *tap*, sounding through the hall, had stayed his hand, he said, "Here is my bread, sir. Take and eat of it." For the little lad thought that though Gundebold might not receive the beggar's share, perhaps

the good God would let him take his own.

As Pepin stood there, the hush in the castle hall deepened; no one moved or spoke, and the only sound was the crackling of the great logs and the flames leaping in the huge fireplace.

For a moment Gundebold gazed into the face of the lad, as gentle as had been that of his own Gaspard, and then all at once the bitterness in his own face began to soften as ice melts in the April time, and in his fierce burning eyes there gleamed a strange tenderness. In the hundred years of his wandering, all, even kind Duke Loys himself, had

shrunk from him. No one but Pepin had come fearlessly to him and offered his own bread. And what pity shone in the lad's eyes, eyes the hue of Gaspard's. Gundebold's punishment had wrought much change in the once proud and haughty lord, and no doubt his heart had come to hunger for pity even as his body hungered for bread; and that hunger was sore upon him now. So presently again he stretched forth his hand, this time for the bread which Pepin offered, and as the lad had hoped, this the good God allowed him to receive. Then, closing behind him the great oaken door, beside which Pierre still stood scarce

knowing what to do, with bowed head Gundebold turned from the threshold and took his way toward the castle drawbridge. Across this he stumbled, blinded by the mist of tears which had not risen to his eyes for so long he scarce knew what they were, and so filled was his mind with crowding thoughts that for a moment he had forgotten the hunger he felt; but just then a fresh pang swept over him and he remembered the lad's gift. At that moment, just as when Pepin had been about to lift the portion to his lips he had paused because of Gundebold's knocking at the door, so now the beggared Duke paused as there came to his ear the

sound of low sobbing near by. As he looked about him, there, by the wintry starlight, he could see a child clad in a tattered smock and crouching in the cold shelter of the snow-laden hedge by the wayside. As the little one saw Gundebold, and in his hands the bit of bread, with a piteous cry it reached its own tiny hands toward it.

In the old days, as I have told you, Duke Gundebold had felt no pity for the poor. Little he cared how scanty the crusts which fell to the lot of the wretched peasants who toiled on his broad lands. But now he himself knew what suffering was; not in vain had been his Twelfth

Night wanderings; and Pepin's gift at last had melted his heart as none would ever have dreamed possible. So, looking at the sobbing child whose face was hidden in the shadow of the hedge, he stooped toward it, laying the bread in its little palms, saying gently as he did so, "Poor little one, to be so cold and hungered! As for myself, I have deserved my punishment, but thou art innocent. Take, and eat."

Though his voice sounded strange and faint, the child heard the words Gundebold spoke, and no sooner did he hold the Twelfth-loaf portion in his little palms than the ragged smock fell from his shoulders, and

whiter than the snow about him shone the little seamless robe he had worn beneath it. For a moment Gundebold had a glimpse of the shining white figure, and of golden curls framing a glad smiling face lovelier than he had ever thought could be; and then, bowing lower still his head, he fell on his knees before the Christ-child. Far and far away echoed the cry of the wolves, the pack which had waited in vain for their comrade; far and farther, till it died away in the distant forests.

While borne on the wind clear and sweet came the sound of cathedral bells from the old town of Angers to

HE FELL ON HIS KNEES BEFORE THE CHRIST-CHILD

the southward; clear and sweet and solemn as for a passing soul that had entered Paradise. Yes, so their ringing sounded under the starlight, though the bell-ringer of Angers declared afterwards that neither his nor any mortal hand had set them ringing. And when their notes had ceased, there by the hedgeside neither the Child nor Gundebold was to be seen, nor was there even a footprint in the smooth snow. Duke Gundebold had won his pardon, and never again did his weary feet tread the wintry roads on Twelfth Night, as he vainly sought God's Share.

VII

But we have not yet done with the fortunes of the lad Pepin. When the oaken door had closed, shutting Gundebold from sight, for a few moments no one stirred or spoke, so moved were they by that which had just passed. Then Duke Loys, wishing not that his feast should be lacking in merriment, turned to his noble guests, and, "Good friends," he said, "our hearts have indeed been touched by the sight of the unhappy beggar who has just departed. But as the Good God allowed him to receive the gift of our King," and

here he smiled and curtsied to Pepin, "let us trust that he will soon win pardon also. So let us not be saddened but do honor right happily to this night when the Three Wise Kings followed the Star to Bethlehem. But," he added, looking kindly at Pepin, "our young ruler is not yet arrayed for the feast."

Pepin, who had stood silent with eyes fixed on the floor, followed the page quietly; indeed, glad he was to leave for a while the company of noble lords and ladies who could not but gaze curiously at him.

When, a little later, again he entered the hall, thou wouldst never have dreamed it could be the same

lad who had that day clung to Duke Loys' groom as they rode up the snowy road to the castle height. Instead of the homespun smock, tattered and worn, which had then covered him, now he was arrayed in a little doublet and hose of white Lyons velvet; on his feet were pointed shoes of soft leather, purple dyed, while from his shoulders hung a mantle of purple satin edged with vair. Looped twice around his neck, because he was but a child, hung a golden chain which had belonged to Duke Loys himself, and on his dark hair was set a small gilded crown.

The page who had attended him led him to the midst of the great

banquet hall and then, bowing low, took his leave. As Pepin stood there in his royal array, his eyes wide with the wonder and bewilderment which had filled them since his coming to the castle, he bore himself so bashfully and modestly and yet withal there was such a look of manliness about the lad, that the noble company again greeted him right warmly with "Long live the King!" And more than one whispered to another, "Truly, 'tis a brave and handsome young ruler we obey this night! None other of us had courage to face Duke Gundebold without fear, as did yonder little peasant lad."

Duke Loys received him with all

courtesy and, as the feast was now ready, led him to the great carved chair cushioned with cloth of gold which stood at the head of the table. There, seeing that the little King, because of his childish stature and the purple mantle to which he was unused, knew not how to seat himself upon his throne, Duke Loys, craving his royal pardon yet with merry laughter to set the lad at ease, stooped, and lifting him in his strong arms, placed him upon the golden cushions. Duke Loys signed his most honored guest to take the seat upon the new King's right while he himself sat at Pepin's left hand so that he might help and hearten the

lad in the part he was to play. Beside the throne stood four noble gentlemen who were accustomed to attend Duke Loys, and pages and squires waited to serve him. Before him was a trencher of gold and a golden cup sparkling with jewels, for very splendid were all the furnishings of the table. And so, all having taken their places, the feast began. When the boar's head with a red apple glistening betwixt its gilded teeth was set before him, the young monarch stared in amazement, and still more did his eyes blink when in came a great silver dish bearing a royal peacock still pranked out in its own gay feathers, though

the noble fowl had been roasting a good two hours on the spit in the castle kitchen. But that the kitchen folk had been most industrious at spits and ovens was proved by the hares and pheasants and huge pasties of venison which followed one another to the long table; and that Duke Loys' pastry cook was master of his art none could deny, after looking upon the wondrous castle of sugar and sweetmeats, with sugar swans floating in its mimic moat, which his hands had fashioned to finish the feast.

Though poor Pepin had known for long but scanty food, and many a day had been forced to content him-

self with a crust, now at the head of that lordly table, though his golden trencher was heaped with dainties, yet naught had he tasted because of his great wonder, till Duke Loys whispered to him, "My King, do thou eat, else thy loyal servants will feel they must follow thy example, and surely thou wouldst not have them go fasting home. 'Tis a play that lasts but till midnight, so make the most of it, my King, for," he added with a smile, "another day thou must look in vain for thy subjects."

As I have told thee, the lad was not lacking in understanding, and being thus reminded that his king-

dom was but a make-believe, he therefore did strive to do Duke Loys' bidding. Though little could he guess what strange fortune had placed him at the head of the feast rather than among the kitchen folk as he had thought to be, nevertheless did he strive now right happily to play his part as best he could, so that the good Duke might not be ashamed because of his choice. Then did he begin to eat of the savory food served to him, and before long Duke Loys' kindly watchfulness and merry jests so put him at his ease that soon he, too, took his little part in the gaiety; and ofttimes, forgetting all his awe of the grandeur

about him, his joyous laughter rang out so fresh and full of glee that all were fain to laugh with him. To be sure, now and again as the purple mantle did slip down his shoulders or he did glimpse the golden chain sparkling on his velvet doublet, then would shyness fall upon him; yet withal did this shyness give to the little king so pleasant a dignity that even those who had envied him the bean did feel their hearts warm toward him, and proud indeed was Duke Loys of the behavior of the lowly lad whom he had chosen to honor in memory of the Christ-child.

Ofttimes, as was the custom at Twelfth Night revels, the Good

Duke would order some noble guest to perform some antic prank, saying, "'Tis the King's command!" Then would Pepin open his eyes wide with amazement till he would catch the twinkle in Duke Loys' own, and then could he not but smile happily at the merriment that would follow. For none durst disobey the king's command.

Yet at last, for all its gaiety, the feast must have an ending, and all did rise from their seats save the little king; him did Duke Loys bid to keep his throne till all his subjects had departed. Before they took their leave, the noble lord who had sat at the right hand of Pepin did

hold speech with others of the company, and presently drawing Duke Loys aside, he laid in his palm a silken purse full of gold pieces. "Your Grace," he said, "though yonder little monarch must soon put off his royal robes and crown and be content with their once wearing, nevertheless well we know thou wilt not send him forth empty-handed. Yet to show our loyalty to so bonny a ruler, fain would we add to thy bounty this purse of gold."

Duke Loys, well pleased that the lad of his choice had found such favor with his noble friends, did thank them all right courteously, and drawing from the bosom of his

own doublet a like purse of gold, then did he say with a smile to the lord who had tendered the first, "Here is a comrade for the purse thou bringest, and these two betwixt them should befriend the little lad till he can fend for himself."

And even so did all come to pass. Though, his reign being over, Pepin needs must doff his crown and royal finery — save only the golden chain; this did Duke Loys bid him keep in memory of his kingship — yet the new garments wherewith the duke had provided him did well become the lad, and stout and warm was the furred coat which did fend him from the weather. And full welcome was

the little lad to the castle's shelter.

As for the gold pieces, these did Duke Loys expend well and wisely for the boy's good. In those days few schools were in Bourbonnaise; therefore, so soon as he could arrange it, the good Duke placed Pepin in a nearby abbey, and there did his life pass happily whilst from the monks of the abbey he gained much useful knowledge, learning from them not only the art of reading but of writing likewise, arts which were then scarce known by many children of the noble folk. When the lad was grown into a sturdy handsome youth, then did Duke Loys find place for him within the castle, not indeed for

service in the kitchen, wherein the lad once thought to be; nay, not there, but in those higher matters concerning the managing of the ducal estate; for in these were Pepin's knowledge and learning full useful. And in return for the great kindness and friendship of his gracious master, ever did Pepin strive to serve him with exceeding love and loyalty.

Nor was Pepin the only lad to know the bounty of the kind Duke; for so long as he lived, each Twelfth Night did Loys place at the head of his feast some poor child. Always, as indeed he had done in the case of Pepin, did he make diligent inquiry

to find some lowly waif of good report whom he might throne as ruler. And always thereafter did he provide generously for the little one, seeing that he was well cared for and taught, so that when man grown he might earn an honest livelihood. And these young lads, having once worn the mimic crown, were ever held by all in much honor; and, because of them, more than ever was the good Duke beloved by his subjects. Indeed, of this kindly custom of Loys to this day mayst thou read in the chronicles of Bourbonnaise. Yet though always did Duke Loys show himself gracious and bounteous to the little ones whom he be-

friended, nevertheless best of all did he love Pepin, who was the first of them thus to wear the royal purple and to rule his feast.

And now at last have I come to the end of the tale. Soon will this Twelfth Day have passed, and on the morrow must we cast in the fire our withered boughs of mistletoe and frayed garlands of holly; and elsewhere must we turn our thoughts. Yet when comes again the holy season, and the Yule-log glows in the fire-place, perchance thou wilt call to mind, my child, something of these things whereof I have told thee.

Perchance thou wilt remember, as I

have done, this little tale of the lad Pepin, of how the Baron Gundebold did at length win his pardon; and of the feast which the good Duke Loys held wherewith to honor the Three Wise Kings who on this day of old did come riding from out the East, seeking the little lord Jesus with their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh: Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar in their splendid purple mantles and crowns of gold, riding on camels all shining with scarlet trappings and tinkling with little silver bells, whilst overhead did shine and sparkle the wondrous Star that led them on to Bethlehem.

THE END

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